

# *News Clippings*

## *February 23, 2009*

### **Emergency Response**

#### **Evansville**

Teams checking southern Indiana ice storm damage

[Read the Article](#)

#### **Pendleton**

Disaster volunteers needed in Pendleton

[Read the Article](#)

#### **Munster**

Police work together on scam artist investigation

[Read the Article](#)

### **Fire**

#### **Brazil**

Saturday morning fire ruled accidental

[Read the Article](#)

#### **Hammond**

Hammond Fire Kills Teen, Devastates Family

[Read the Article](#)

### **Severe Weather**

#### **Indianapolis**

Weather Damage Assessment Continues in Southern Indiana

[Read the Article](#)

#### **Evansville**

Clearing the debris

[Read the Article](#)

Associated Press

[February 16, 2009](#)

EVANSVILLE, Ind. -

Federal and state inspectors plan to visit 15 southern Indiana counties in the coming days to check on damage from last month's ice storm.

The inspection reports will help determine whether the area might receive federal disaster assistance from the Jan. 28 storm.

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security says inspection teams are starting work Monday in Crawford, Perry, Switzerland, Vanderburgh and Washington counties. Others that will be visited are Clark, Dubois, Floyd, Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Jefferson, Orange, Spencer and Warrick counties.

More than 100,000 homes and businesses in counties along the Ohio River lost electricity for days after power lines buckled under up to three-quarters of an inch of ice.

[Back to Top](#)



## Disaster volunteers needed in Pendleton

By Brandi Watters, Herald Bulletin Staff Writer

February 16, 2009 11:05 pm

— PENDLETON — Town police officers are hoping to get help from area residents in the event of a disaster.

Pendleton Police Chief Marc Farrer said the department wants to form a CERT, or Community Emergency Response Team.

The group, made up of local volunteers, would assist local emergency personnel during emergency incidents such as floods, tornadoes, power outages, evacuations and terrorist attacks.

“Past experience has shown that during major disaster, law enforcement, along with fire and medical personnel, will not be able to meet the demand necessary to adequately function,” Farrer said.

The Pendleton Police Department, he said, is made up of seven full-time police officers and seven reserve officers.

The volunteers would undergo training through the Madison County Emergency Management Agency beginning in late March, Farrer said, and would be provided with all necessary training and equipment to ready themselves for emergencies.

Todd Harmeson of the county’s Emergency Management Agency said residents historically jump into action during disasters, often helping neighbors and family members through emergency situations. “This was the case following the Mexico City earthquake where untrained, spontaneous volunteers saved 800 people. However, 100 people lost their lives while attempting to save others. This is a high price to pay and is preventable through training.”

Farrer said he first learned about CERTs when council members got involved. “The town council had actually asked me to look into supporting my police agency with volunteers.”

Farrer said volunteers would likely respond in the event of tornadoes, floods or power outages, but Pendleton poses various public safety risks in addition to weather incidents.

The threat of terrorist activity exists in Pendleton, he said, and the town’s businesses and factories may pose a hazard if an incident were to occur. Train derailments are another possibility.

Fire Chief Danny Gardner said CERT volunteers could assist in evacuating residents during a hazardous materials incident.

Over 20 years ago, he said, every resident who lived north of State Street had to be evacuated in Pendleton when a train began leaking hazardous material. At the time, nearly half the town was evacuated.

In most cases, the CERT teams would be used for flooding, Harmeson said. “CERT teams could assist with sand-bagging or supplement Red Cross staffing at emergency shelters.”

“Madison County is not immune to disasters,” Harmeson said.

Farrer said any adult of any age or physical condition could volunteer because tasks could be as simple as making phone calls and coordinating incident command centers.

CERT teams have already been formed in Frankton and Elwood.

Madison County Sheriff Ron Richardson said the teams provide needed backup for area emergency responders. “Most emergency departments are understaffed anyway.”

Richardson said community outreach during emergencies is essential. County emergency responders recently had to assist a woman in Summitville during a power outage because she was on oxygen without electricity in her home.

CERT members, Richardson said, could free up emergency responders by responding to such situations throughout the community. “It allows emergency responders to tend to the most serious situations.”

Those interested in becoming a CERT volunteer should contact Farrer at the Pendleton Police Department at 778-3933.

**Want to join the CERT team?**

Call the Pendleton Police Department at 778-3933.

[Back to Top](#)



THE LARGEST AND MOST TRUSTED MEDIA COMPANY IN NORTHWEST INDIANA

# Police work together on scam artist investigation

BY DEBORAH LAVERTY

[dlaverty@nwitimes.com](mailto:dlaverty@nwitimes.com)

219.762.1397, ext. 2223 | Friday, February 20, 2009 | [\(2 comment\(s\)\)](#)

MUNSTER | They are known as scams, burglaries targeting the elderly that are being reported in numerous communities in Northwest Indiana and the south Chicago suburbs.

"I don't think there's a community that's been spared," said Munster Police Chief Stephen Scheckel. "Next to children, our elderly are the most vulnerable."

So with the intention of sharing information and coordinating efforts, Scheckel, a district coordinator for the Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center, held a seminar on Tuesday for about 70 police officers from five counties in Indiana.

Seminar speakers included police officers from both Illinois State Police and Chicago Police departments who have dealt with the scam artists, the majority of whom reside in Chicago.

"We were told by the speakers that those who commit the scams operate in teams and will hit an area then lie low. They are good at which they do," Scheckel said.

Typically, in the scams reported in this area, the suspects knock on the houses of senior citizens, claiming either to be contractors there to do work on the house or representatives of a local utility. They talk - or try to force - their way into the homes of their victims. Once inside, they steal cash, jewelry and other valuables, sometimes reportedly thousands of dollars.

"They're good at what they do. And they always work in teams of three with a driver, a person who goes in and distracts the homeowner and the person who takes the money," Scheckel said.

In addition to offering a profile of the scam artists, the seminar speakers also encouraged officers to talk about some of their cases or to offer help in future incidents.

"When they have cases they know who to call," Scheckel said.

Doug Johnson, who serves as a deputy director for liaison affairs with the Indiana Intelligence Fusion Center, said the seminar is an example of the center's initiative of improving information sharing among departments.

"The training was well received," Johnson said.

He agreed with Scheckel that the northwest part of the state has been particularly hard hit by the scam artists.

Elderly are targeted because in some cases they won't report the crime for fear their relatives will think they are becoming senile.

"They play on the minds, vision and hearing of the elderly," Johnson said.

Scheckel said many of the departments, his included, intend to hold seminars for the seniors offering them tips on what they've learned.

"Hopefully with this type of training sessions we will also become sharper," Scheckel said. "Now at least officers are attuned to the players in the scam and this will translate to more arrests."

[Back to Top](#)

## Saturday morning fire ruled accidental

Monday, February 16, 2009

By IVY JACKSON, *Times Staff Reporter*

An unidentified Brazil resident lost nearly all her possessions and was injured in an apartment fire Saturday morning.

Because of the extensive damage in the apartment, a fire marshal with the Indiana Department of Homeland Security Division of Fire and Building Safety investigated the scene to help determine the cause the fire.

"It has been officially ruled accidental," Fire Chief Jim Smith said Monday, explaining the tenant had apparently left something cooking on the stove unattended and it caught fire. "She was very lucky."

According to authorities, the Brazil City Fire Department was dispatched to Apartment 3 at the Logan Court Apartment complex shortly after 1 a.m.

Within three minutes, firefighters arrived on the scene and 15 minutes later, they had the fire out.

Van Buren Volunteer Fire Department firefighters were notified to standby at the station if BCFD needed assistance with tenants in case the fire spread throughout the building.

"Thankfully we didn't need them. It was a quick response by our guys," Smith told The Brazil Times about the fire, which he said gutted the apartment.

"We were able to get it out pretty fast. Most of the damage was contained to the original apartment."

However, Smith confirmed the two adjoining apartments on each side of the original center apartment received minor smoke damage and one had some minor water damage.

Smith said the young woman who lived in the apartment was covered in so much soot from the extreme heat and thick smoke of the fire it was difficult to determine the extent of her injuries at the fire scene Saturday.

When TransCare personnel transported the soot-covered tenant to St. Vincent Clay Hospital, Smith said doctors treated her for severe smoke inhalation and the subsequent injuries to her nose and throat.

Due to the situation, Smith said he didn't have much time to talk with the fire victims Saturday.

But he confirmed the American Red Cross was contacted to provide assistance to the tenant and the neighboring families who suffered loss of housing due to the fire.

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[Back to Fire](#)





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## Hammond Fire Kills Teen, Devastates Family

**By WISE Web News**

Story Published: Feb 15, 2009 at 1:19 PM EST

Story Updated: Feb 15, 2009 at 4:24 PM EST

HAMMOND, Ind. (AP) (Indiana's NewsCenter)- An apartment fire in Hammond killed a 14-year-old girl and sent two family members to a hospital.

The Lake County coroner's office says Elizabeth Ann Schnyder was pronounced dead of burns and smoke inhalation at 2:20 a.m. Saturday at the Greenbriar Apartments.

Hammond Chief Fire Inspector Kevin Margraf says the girl's mother and brother suffered smoke inhalation and were taken to a Chicago-area hospital. Information on their conditions wasn't immediately available.

The mother's boyfriend also was injured, but Margraf says his injuries aren't life-threatening. State Fire Marshal's Office investigator Jeff Roseboom says officials believe the fire started in the girl's bedroom but don't know the cause. Investigators don't believe the fire was intentionally set.

Residents were allowed back into the apartment building later Saturday.

[Back to Fire](#)





## Weather Damage Assessment Continues in Southern Indiana

By Network Indiana

2/17/2009

Five joint federal and state damage assessment teams have begun surveying 15 southern Indiana counties affected by last month's ice and snow storms.

The survey results will determine if any of those counties are eligible for federal assistance.

Rachel Meyer with the Indiana Department of Homeland Security says the four person teams will take about a week to collect the information before submitting their report to IDHS.

Southern Indiana residents are familiar with the approval process because it's the same one used following last summer's record flood damage.

If IDHS thinks federal assistance is needed and Governor Daniels concurs, the governor will submit the request to President Obama.

The deadline for residents of the affected counties to submit online damage reports is today at the Indiana Department of Homeland Security website.

[Back to Severe Weather](#)

## Clearing the debris

Ice storm's damage tackled as cleanup expenses mount

By [Jimmy Nesbitt](#) ([Contact](#))

Monday, February 16, 2009

The first day of the city's special storm debris curbside collection program hardly could have gone any smoother, said a key official of Allied Waste of Evansville.

Todd Chamberlain, Allied Waste's division sales manager, said that collections of limbs and trees in the city that were downed by last month's ice storm were heavy, but not unexpectedly so.

"As of 3 p.m. (Monday), the material we've brought in in the city today is roughly the same size as half of a football field and the equivalent of 6 or 7 feet high," Chamberlain said. "That was in line with our initial estimates."

The program is expected to last about two weeks, and first-day collections came from the southeastern quadrant of the city, Chamberlain said, in areas such as Newburgh Road, Plaza Drive and Arcadian Acres subdivision.

A separate storm debris collection program for Vanderburgh County residents will begin Wednesday if the County Commissioners approve it at 5 p.m. today. The county offers no curbside debris removal or trash collection service, leaving residents free to contract for those services themselves.

Under the county's proposed plan, residents could dispose of storm debris at Burdette Park and at the former Busler's store on U.S. 41.

Allied Waste also would extend its curbside pickup routes into the county for storm debris pickup.

On the first day of the city's program, Chamberlain said, residents abided by requests that woody tree debris be placed curbside and that it be no more than 4 feet long or 6 inches in diameter.

There is no requirement that storm debris be in any specific container, but it should be stacked to minimize safety hazards. It should be separate from other waste.

Cleanup costs from the ice storm are being compiled, but County Commissioners Troy Tornatta said he expects Vanderburgh County will qualify for federal assistance.

Joint inspection teams began an assessment Monday of public infrastructure damage in 16 Southern Indiana counties. The teams included representatives of the Indiana Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Indiana Department of Transportation and local emergency management.

The city has estimated the cleanup will cost \$366,000, and the county expects to spend at least \$120,000, Tornatta said. Harry Lawson, Evansville Water and Sewer Utility general manager, said last week that 14-day storm debris pickup, which began Monday, would cost \$350,000.

The cleanup costs for Vanderburgh County are expected to increase because several agencies still are working and haven't compiled their expenses, said Vanderburgh County Emergency Management Agency Director Sherman Greer.

County Council President Tom Shetler Jr. said the county may also contract with Allied Waste to provide roadside pickup. Shetler said the council also is considering using county employees for the debris pickup to lower the cost. Some of the sites in the county are along rural farmland and not ideal for a roadside pickup, he said.

Tornatta said FEMA could reimburse up to 75 percent of the cleanup costs for the city and county. Several steps must take place first to determine eligibility. Once the inspection teams complete the assessment, they will submit a report to the Indiana Department of Homeland Security.

If the Department of Homeland Security determines the damage is significant enough to receive federal funding, the report is given to Gov. Mitch Daniels' office. Daniels then will have the ability to ask President Barack Obama for federal assistance.

Several criteria are considered, such as the type of damage and location, but cost is the primary factor, said Rachel Meyer, spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security. She said the financial threshold for Vanderburgh County to be eligible for federal assistance is about \$600,000. That figure includes both city and county expenses.

Meyer said it's difficult to speculate when a ruling will be made because the assessments could take longer than expected. She said about three weeks is the most optimistic projection.

Lawson said the ice storm produced three times the amount of debris that the windstorm from Hurricane Ike produced in September.

"It's been difficult — a lot of work," Lawson said.

Meyer said the assessment teams are focusing on public infrastructure because most of the damage to homes was covered by insurance companies.

[Back to Severe Weather](#)